

Water Security and the River Murray – 11 Sept, 2007

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond): I rise today to talk about water security and the future of the River Murray. One thing that troubles me greatly is that this government has not done anything to pressure other state governments about the over-allocation of water resources throughout the Murray-Darling Basin. Even today, we hear that the Minister for Water Security can only talk about the future from here on when the federal government takes over control of the basin. It means that the Rann Labor government has been caught napping for the last six years and, only due to public disquiet, it has had to come out with some form of policy because of a screaming backbench.

I want to speak about the policy of the government to increase the capacity of Mount Bold by 200 gigalitres and therefore, in its surmising, to increase Adelaide's storage capacity for two years. What happens in the third year—as we see currently—or the fourth or fifth year? Government members know as well as I do that it will take the River Murray to keep that storage full. It does not take any less water out of the River Murray; it takes far more. I think that the \$1 billion could be employed elsewhere, perhaps in regional desalination plants that could be plumbed into the SA Water system. I have had advice that there is only 9.3 gigalitres of average spill over the present spillway at Mount Bold, so there is no way in the world that it will supplement its own filling to a decent supply.

The Liberal Party, under former leader Iain Evans, brought up the desalination policy. The Labor Party has now come on stream under public pressure to bring up its own desalination plans. What interests me is that the Minister indicated to me at a public meeting that the government was looking at costings for a 100 gigalitre plant and a 50 gigalitre plant. So, today I asked the question: where have the costings gone for the 100 gigalitre plant?

Several members on this side of the house visited the desalination plant in Perth. Yes, it is in a different location to where we are in the gulf, but the inlet for that plant is only 200 metres out to sea. The outlet is only 200 metres out to sea, and they are only 200 metres apart. In quantifying the outlet, it does stretch out another 250 metres and diffuses the salt back into the sea through 48 diffusers. The truth is that that salt dissipates within 50 metres. We are not injecting arsenic back into the sea. We have all this talk about brine and how toxic it is. We do have to do the studies and we have to get it right. It may include kilometres of outflow pipe. I am well aware of that. The people of Adelaide and South Australia need a water supply, and they need it from alternative sources. It is good to see that the government has finally come on board and committed to desalination, even though it might take 15 years.

I wish to speak about the backflip on drippers. It has nothing to do with inflows, because the 11 gigalitres of water the minister and the Premier quite roundly carry on about have been in the system for over a month. Reservoir levels have been up since the rains in June and July, and the information on which the government supposedly based its garden watering decision is hardly new. They blamed the Prime Minister, they could not trust the people and, when the minister was running out of options, she blamed the interstate premiers for putting the pressure on. I think that the only people the government listened to in this debate and in changing its mind were its backbenchers, who were worried about doing a single term in parliament.

As to the Wellington weir project, I would like to see it thrown off the books for good. I was under the impression that, once we got 1 500 gigalitres of water, irrigation allocations would go up. I do not deny the irrigation industry the right to water but, from what I

have heard today, only 1 100 or 1 200 gegalitres are coming into the system. However, it will make the irrigation industry better off to get that water.

Finally, I want to talk to talk about costings, as the Premier was so keen to challenge us on the costings on various things today, including desalination plants. How far out are you when you come up with a proposal of \$20 million for the proposed Wellington weir, although it will cost at least \$110 million to put it out and, I would estimate, \$110 million to pull it out of the river? In line with that, no environmental impact statements are then talked about. They talked about heavy salination but, 'We'll just wipe out some Liberal voters south of Wellington. That's what we'll do.'